

BIRDS: VERIFYING DOCUMENTATION OF
AN EXTRAORDINARY SIGHT RECORD

imm. (NSH)

Species: Golden Eagle (Aquila chrysaetos) Number: I

Location: Ten miles North of Waukon, on Highway 76, Allamakee County, Iowa

Date: March 26, 1978 Time bird seen: 8:15 am to 8:25 am

Description: The bird was observed only in flight. The heavy, long bill, more than a third the length head. Head seem slightly small for size of bird. Body was heavy with a distinct feathery ruff, covering legs, with toes just barely being visible. Long and broad wings with five or six of the primaries being fingered, and widely separated. Tail was somewhat long and fan shaped. Color of bill was grey, eye appeared dark. Head, belly, wing coverts (from below), were a rich brown. In the bright sun, the slightly iridescence of sides of neck showed coppery, a little of this also was present on the nape and head. Distinct white areas at base of primaries extended well into secondaries. The tail was mostly white at the base with a broad dark terminal band. Outside of the white and iridescence, the bird was a uniform dark, rich brown. While soaring the bird was joined on the rising air thermal, by a Rough-legged Hawk (Buteo lagopus), which was in an intermediate phase, was different not only in size but also in shape and color. The Rough-legged Hawk was smaller, narrower winged. In color the hawk was light with dark, wing edges, dark wrist mark and underwing coverts.

Description of behavior: The bird was seen soaring over a bluff, it circled about seven times, then moved to the North behind the bluff and was no longer seen. The soaring style of this bird, was somewhat like that of a Bald Eagle (Haliaeetus leucocephalus), but not so flat and the long "fingers" seemed to move more, as shifting and testing of wind movement took place.

Habitat: The general area under the soaring bird was a bluff, covered mostly with Oak, Maple, Birch and scattered Junipers. The bluff rises about 150 feet from the floodplain of the Upper Iowa River. There are many other bluffs similar to the one briefly described here, that surround the area of sighting.

Similar species: Bald Eagle; my bird was not mottled as an immature Bald is, also my bird had totally dark under wing coverts. The distinct demarcation of light to dark on my bird also was rather un-Baldlike. Since an on the spot size comparison was made with a buteo, and the latter was found to be much smaller, I feel safe to say all others of this genus can be ruled out.

Distance: An estimation of closest observation was about 250 feet.

Optical equipment: The bird by me with unaided eyes, and through 7 by 35, Bushnell Custom binoculars.

Light: Clear sky, sun was well above horizon but not relatively high into sky. The bird was in direct sunlight, with sun directly at my back. As a whole, good viewing conditions at time of sighting.

Previous experience: I am familiar with all plumages of both Bald and Golden Eagles since Bald is a common wintering species, and have seen at least five other Golden Eagles.

Other observers: Allan Branhagen, Decorah, Iowa

Books consulted: Robbins "Birds of North America"

Detailed notes were taken at time of sighting and were rewritten into their current form.

Date: March 27, 1978

Address: St. Lucas, Iowa

Signature: *Joe Schaufenbuel*
Joe Schaufenbuel

52166